

ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Even though our world is capable of producing enough food to supply an adequate diet for all, hundreds of millions of people go hungry. Chronic undernourishment persists among rural populations in poor developing countries. Why isn't there enough food for all? Is it possible to eradicate world hunger?

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, or FAO, fights poverty and hunger by promoting the welfare of rural communities and increasing agricultural production. Our guest today is Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO.

Joining me to talk with Mr. Diouf are Bhaskar Menon of the *International Documents Review* and Afsane Bassir Pour of *Le Monde*. Mr. Diouf, welcome to World Chronicle.

DIOUF: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: I was interested to read sir, that your agency is the largest specialized agency in the United Nations system, and in fact, pre-dates the United Nations itself. Perhaps you can tell us a little bit about FAO, how you go about your business, how you are trying to provide food for all. I presumably buy technical assistance but perhaps you would like to give us a little bit of information about FAO.

DIOUF: Well, FAO was created on the 16 of October 1945. Therefore, came into existence one week before the UN. We have responsibility in the area of agriculture, crop and animal production, but also forestry and fisheries. We have activities in two main areas, what we call the normality function of the organization, where we provide information through collection processing, dissemination of information of statistics on those four areas. We also help countries get together to agree on ways and means for using natural resources, like water, like soils but naturally forestry, fisheries, problems of pesticides, problems of codes of conduct on responsible fishing. And we also have a responsibility to set standards, for the quality of agricultural commodities with our partners of WHO.

LITTLEJOHNS: World Health Organization.

DIOUF: The World Health Organization. We have what we call the correct alimentarious where we set the norms for the quality of products, and these norms are in fact, the standards are in fact being used by WTO for settling disputes.

LITTLEJOHNS: The World Trade Organization.

DIOUF: The World Trade Organization.

LITTLEJOHNS: Explain that a bit more. I mean when you say, set standards, what kind of standards are you setting?

DIOUF: Well, the quality, what should be for example, the component in hormone or not in hormone, what should be the content in protein or in other elements. Just to give you an example, even the dates that are fixed and marked on products to indicate...

LITTLEJOHNS: The expiration date for sale.

DIOUF: For sale was a standard set by our coding system.

LITTLEJOHNS: Speaking of standards, were you involved, was your agency involved in this controversy about mad cow diseases? Which was exciting the British for so long?

DIOUF: Well, we got naturally, involved with other partners of the UN system. But this time the leadership was that of the World Health Organization because it was a matter of public health. But naturally we came in on the question of condition of feeding the animals, and what lead in the condition of feeding to the transmission of the mad cow disease.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is that still a serious problem?

DIOUF: Well it is still a serious problem. The question naturally is to which extent we will control more, the feeding of the animals, and to which extent we will also control the trade in areas where there are risks.

MENON: Perhaps you can go back and explain why we have so much food in the world and yet there are hungry people?

DIOUF: Well, as I was just mentioning beyond our function in the normative area we have our operational function which is assistance to member countries, in improving their food situation.

MENON: No, no, why are people hungry..?

DIOUF: I am coming to that. This function relates directly to the question of hunger in the world. We have people who are hungry in the world mainly because of the question of lack of distribution, effective distribution of product capacity and problems of access. Few developed countries produce enough food for the whole world to satisfy the dietary needs. Yet, there are continents that are not producing enough and on the African continent in particular, over the last twenty years, agricultural production per capita has gone down. Which means that people have less food available per person to satisfy their needs.

MENON: But where does the failure lie in this? Obviously the blame must be placed somewhere. What is it.. something like fifty or sixty million people go hungry, is that the estimate?

BASSIR POUR: Nearly one fifth, nearly one fifth..

DIOUF: Eight hundred million of which unfortunately, two hundred million children below the age of five who have a deficit in....

MENON: So, someone must bear the responsibility for this. Who does?

DIOUF: Well, let me first say that there are problems of transfer of knowledge and there are problems of transfer of resources and there are naturally, socio-political problems. The problem of transfer of knowledge and resources would relate mainly to the issue to productive capacity. If we take the African continent for example, only eight per cent of the arable land has water control.

LITTLEJOHNS: What? Water control?

DIOUF: Water control

BASSIR POUR: Is this is a problem of national governments or is it to do with the UN system, I think that is what my colleague is trying to ask?

MENON: Right, I mean it's not a technical question because technically I think we have the means to solve the problem. It's obviously a political problem, and in political terms, where does the responsibility lie?

DIOUF: It's both, its a technical problem, its an economic problem, it's a political and social problem. Technically when we have regions in the world that are producing with yields that are ten per cent what can be achieved with present knowledge, then there is a technical problem. There is also a problem of economic and social nature when we see that the transfer of resources to the agriculture sector, in terms of development assistance, has been going down instead of going up. There is a problem of political and social nature in terms of the political will, to give priority to the agriculture sector at nation level and international level. And there is also a political and social problem in countries where there is enough production in developing countries but yet, there are the number of people in those population who do not have access to food.

BASSIR POUR: Mr. Diouf, is the right to eat a part of human rights? I mean, have countries accepted that everybody has the right to....

LITTLEJOHNS: Adequate nutrition.

BASSIR POUR: To eat, I mean the right to not go hungry is basically what I mean. Is it part of human rights?

DIOUF: I believe it is the most basic human right.

BASSIR POUR: Yes, it should be, but is it accepted as such?

DIOUF: Well, err.. err legally, I would say no! Because we are setting in our objective which is already a very important objective following the World Food Summit that by the year 2015, half of these eight hundred people will not have adequate access to food. But it means that we are accepting that also half may not have food, which means that

therefore, the right is not there, at least it is translated into concrete reality. We therefore, conceded, that if you do not have the right to food, you don't exist. You cannot exert other rights, like the right to free speech, the right to democracy, the right to vote.

BASSIR POUR: So it is part of human rights?

DIOUF: It is the fundamental element of the human rights.

MENON: But do you sell it as that? Do you for instance, have you for instance met Mary Robinson, the new High Commissioner for Human Rights?

DIOUF: Not as a High Commissioner but I met her as President, we had an opportunity to see each other in Rome, also following a visit she made to different parts of Africa, in particular to Rwanda and Burundi.

LITTLEJOHNS: When she was the President of Ireland.

DIOUF: When she was the President of Ireland but since she took up office, I had not had the opportunity.

BASSIR POUR: Now establishing the fact that this is basic human rights, we go back to what you were saying that governments are paying less to your agency as to other agencies. The donations are becoming less and less. Now why are they paying less for people to eat?

DIOUF: Well, to our agency I must say our position is one of the best. Therefore, the governments also I still have some arrears are usually paying their contributions to FAO. The issue is, the issue of ODA, Office of Development Assistance, and it is in the Office of Development Assistance that the share of agriculture is going down, both from the part of bilateral agencies than multilateral agencies. But I must say over these last three and a half years, we've been discussing with these institutions, and I must report with pleasure, that the trend seems to be changing now in the right direction.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Diouf isn't that.... go ahead, go ahead.

MENON: No, I was going to ask you a major factor in the shortage of food is waste. Both in the developed countries and also the developing countries. What are you doing about that?

DIOUF: There are two types of wastage, I would say. In developed countries is the excess food that is thrown away. From restaurants, from houses after certain expiration dates we were just mentioning, or for hygienic reasons and so on. In the developing countries the wastage is due to the lack of technology and capacity to preserve and to conserve food.

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean storage.

DIOUF: Storage facilities mainly. But also sometimes processing. Lack of processing capacity beyond the storage that would put them in products that can't stay for a long time.

MENON: So what's your estimate of how much percentage of food is wasted?

DIOUF: Well, it's roughly known in developed countries, surprisingly we do not have the data for developed countries. For developing countries around thirty to forty per cent is lost.

LITTLEJOHNS: For developing countries?

DIOUF: For developing countries.

MENON: For which countries..

DIOUF: For developing countries we don't have the real estimate.

BASSIR POUR: I just want to take a specific country if you don't mind. I would like to talk about Iraq. Now, we know that lot's of people go hungry in Iraq because of the international sanctions. Do you participate in projects in Iraq?

DIOUF: Oh yes.

BASSIR POUR: And especially in 1986, the resolution that allows Iraq to sell oil for food.

DIOUF: Yes. First, we have been during all these period present in Iraq. Even before the oil for food programme, we have been involved there, with the authorization of the Sanction Committee of the United Nations. We are flying planes and helicopters in the no fly zone for treating different crops against diseases. We are intervening also to protect the animals in the country, we are also helping in insuring that the minimum capacity of production is maintained in those countries naturally within the legal framework provided by the Sanction Committee and we go every time to get authorization for bringing chemicals, for bringing pilots, for bringing helicopters, so on to do the work.

BASSIR POUR: Is there enough food in Iraq Mr. Diouf?

DIOUF: No! there's not enough food.

BASSIR POUR: So should they be allowed to buy more food, sell more oil, buy more food or not?

DIOUF: Well, allow these matter of a international decision of the Security Council and of the General Assembly. But what we do as an agricultural organization, is assess the situation and we have said the situation has lead to proportion where it is affecting the nutrition of the population and the children in particular, and that the situation requires some action, corrective action to provide more food to the population of Iraq. Now what are the political implication of the decision? This is for the Security Council and the General Assembly to deal with.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Mr. Diouf, you mentioned the fact that your organization has been receiving very substantial contributions. The market forces must be a difficult factor though. I mean if food, wheat in particular, rice also, is given free, don't people get a little upset in the commodity markets because it upsets the balance of trade?

DIOUF: Well, we believe that food not only could, but should be given free in crises situation. When you have a situation where there is a war, civil war or war in the countries and there are populations that doesn't have anything to eat or because of drought or because of flood and it's not physically possible to affectively produce and to supply the food in those areas. The only way to deal with the needs of the population is to provide them with food, and to do it free because during that period the countries the don't have the capacity to buy. But we believe that this is a short solution and it should not be done for a long period, and it should even in that situation you don't take into consideration the regional capability to provide such food not again to offset the different flows of food from one region to the other or within that region from one country to the other.

MENON: So, so, every year you have World Food Day and in '97 you had an international radio programme called Telefood, or a television broadcast programme called Telefood. What exactly are you trying to achieve with this, what are you telling the people, what's your message?

DIOUF: Two things. I want to have the capacity to reach out to population of the globe. We are a universal organization by essence, constituency is the world, we should be able to talk to the world. And the only way we can do it is through modern media communication, through television via satellite and through radio, we can reach out to people around the world. What do we try to pass on the message, er.. as message? First, what is the situation today? What progress have we made? What obstacles have we encountered? For what reason? What can be done to deal with those issues? And where have we been successful? Where have we failed. What is possible, also so what can be done?

MENON: Could you answer perhaps one of those questions? What can be done?

DIOUF: Well a lot of things. First, I believe that we can train better the farmers into new technologies to make them more efficient. We can help the farmer organize better their water control system, so that they become less dependent on the vagaries of the climate.

MENON: Yeah, but when you are speaking to the global population, what can they do that would make, that would have any effect on the world food situation?

DIOUF: Well, there are different ways by which they can do something. First by exerting their rights as citizens, to control what their governments are doing and to guide their governments in what they are doing in term of the policies that are adopted. Secondly,

they are also these citizens, producers. They constitute the private sector, they constitute the investors, they constitute the market. All these are made of human beings.

MENON: But you know one of the strange facts about the world food situations is that historically the price, the real price of food has fallen dramatically, it is now about a third of what it was a hundred years ago.

LITTLEJOHNS: When did you last go to a supermarket?

MENON: No in real terms. Adjusted for inflation. the real price...

LITTLEJOHNS: So why is the price going up all the time in the market?

MENON: Michael, it is adjusted. In real terms, the price of food has fallen. It is a third of what it was a hundred years ago. Now what this means is that for the people who can afford food, who can buy food, whatever the market, food is available and it's cheaper. The eight hundred million who are hungry are out of the market. So when you speak to a global audience, you are essentially speaking to the people who are not hungry.

DIOUF: No, not at all. For example, we have used in the Telefood programme of this year, fourteen satellites. Which have allowed us to reach out to people in Africa, in Asia, in Latin America in the Pacific, in the Caribbean. And these are not only the people who are in a position where they can buy everything. And we believe also that we can use the tool that allows us to be as near to the public as possible. That's why I am saying not only are we using television, we are using radio. Because that too also, is more spread out in population that can not afford a TV set.

LITTLEJOHNS: Since we are talking about food, what was the feed back from the Telefood?

DIOUF: Well, the feedback has been positive in that we have been able through the programme out of Rome, out of live television to reach out to between a hundred million and four hundred million people. In addition to that, China did broadcast a programme which is expected to have reached out to another four hundred million people.

LITTLEJOHNS: So you are getting up close to a billion people?

DIOUF: We're getting up to a billion person and in addition to that we have also collected some funds in Italy, it should be between, around one point seven million dollars and when the other contribution come...

MENON: You mean people are sending you money?

DIOUF: Sending money you know, to just support our action and naturally we have....

LITTLEJOHNS: Specifically, Telefood?

DIOUF: Yes, but we have indicated naturally that this fund will not be used for administrative purposes, it will be for grassroots level projects going to the farmers, in the

rural communities in the field and controlled naturally by our audits system including la Court des Comptes de France which is our external auditors.

BASSIR POUR: I also understand you have also reached out to Hollywood, you have tried to make this a cause celebre for Hollywood. Is this working?

DIOUF: Yes it is working! I must say we were very pleased to see that the during the Festival de Cannes, we had the main actress and actors supporting our appeal to do something about food. And we have also in the area of sports we've had Renaldo, you know, who supported also our initiative, and naturally in music, also, because we have had some of the main artists in Italy.

LITTLEJOHNS: Pavaratti is a big fellow. He must conceal a lot of food is he involved?

DIOUF: Well, he supported the initiative, he has not participated in the concert but we hope that next year, he will certainly be part of the....

BASSIR POUR: What can these people do, these celebrities? Do they become your ambassadors? Do they continue? Or is it a one time Telefood thing?

DIOUF: Well, so far we have not introduced the ambassador concept in FAO. We have mainly worked with those celebrities to prepare World Food Day, to inform the public, to send messages and to participate in the performance for the public opinion to naturally entertain them in between messages.

MENON: But don't you think that when you're talking about a problem so vast and so engrained in market forces, that you need something more than good feeling and good publicity? You need hard decisions taken on the political level. And how do you, what are the mechanisms that people have that they can affect that kind of change?

DIOUF: You are right. That is why we first started with calling a World Food Summit for the first time in the history of FAO at the level of heads of states and government because we believe that it was not only the technical problem...

LITTLEJOHNS: In 1995

DIOUF: No, in '96, in November '96. And we had a hundred and twelve heads of states and government, who attended the seminar. One hundred eighty six countries participated, we had six thousand six hundred participants not only from governments, but parliaments were represented and had their specific meeting of parliamentarian, the private sector, the NGO's and the youths. We had a youth forum.

MENON: Did you detect any change in policy as a result of this?

DIOUF: Well, you know you cannot within a year have a complete change, I don't believe so. But already in our relation with a number of institution, we have seen their interest, their commitment I must say I am very pleased to report the reaction I got from the

World Bank, which signed with us an agreement in, on the 13 of January this year. Same thing with the African Development Bank on the 20th of January the Islamic Development Bank. And they are mobilizing through those agreements around one hundred and forty million dollars for the special programme on food security which we launched in nineteen countries already and which is being formulated in thirty two more countries, and in the end we will cover eighty six countries for concrete action in the field on water control, crop intensification, diversification into small animal production and agriculture. But also on the study of socio-economic continents including market forces.

BASSIR POUR: We can't talk about food without thinking about North Korea. Is there a famine going on there still and what is the situation and what are you doing about it?

DIOUF: I was in North Korea some weeks ago. And I must say that I have seen the situation let me say of the production. I have not seen the hungry people, I was only there for two days. And the production....

BASSIR POUR: They would not have allowed you to actually see the people who are suffering?

DIOUF: No, no, it's just that I did not have time enough, I had only two days and it was just what was necessary for discussing with the governments for going into the field to see the areas where we have had flood, the area where have had drought, and the area where the tidal wave of seven to eight meters took over the dikes and entered into the field. And I saw kilometres and the miles of rice which had reached the level of maturity but when you look at the grain there was nothing. I have also seen a lot of houses completely destroyed from the effect of the tidal wave and being reconstructed.

BASSIR POUR: So these are natural causes, the government is not to blame in, for the famine?

DIOUF: You know, my job is not in the blaming. My job is...

BASSIR POUR: But mine is to ask though.

DIOUF: As Director-General of FAO is to see within the area of our mandate what we can do, what we can identify in the situation. And we sent a mission jointly, with the World Food Programme to identify the magnitude of the problem and the needs. We came to the conclusion that this year we will need one point nine million tonnes of cereal to face up to the needs of the North Korean. That most probably seven hundred thousand could be covered through commercial imports, but that would still be a deficits of one point two million tonnes. I must say, we started throwing the attention of the world through our early warning system already two and a half years ago, and we even testified in certain parliaments about the situation in North Korea. So we did our job of early warning and information. We followed up with regular survey of the situation, on action we followed up

by providing seeds, by providing fertilizers implement and technical advise to the government. And by informing our other partners as to how we will work together to deal with the situation.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Diouf, we have only a very few seconds left, do you think you are going to reach your target of having the number of undernourished people by the year 2015?

DIOUF: I have no doubt that we can do it, and I'm doing on the part of FAO all that is the responsibility to do it. But I also must have the humility of recognizing that we can't do it alone.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Diouf, that's all we have we have. Thanks for being with you on this edition of World Chronicle.

Our guest has been Jacques Diouf, Director-General of Food and Agriculture Organization, of the United Nations. He was interviewed by Bhaskar Menon, of the *International Documents Review* and Afsane Bassir Pour, of *Le Monde*. I'm Michael Littlejohns, thank you for joining us and we invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.